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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Operations Center

(GUYANA WORKING GROUP)

Situation Report No. IX

Situation in Guyana as of 1230 A.M. (EST), November 20, 19

EMBASSY REPORT

Victor Dikeos, DCM Panama, detailed to Georgetown at the beginning of the crisis, has reported on his visit today to Jonestown. On arrival they found 405 bodies: three or four had died of gunshot wounds, the rest from poisoning. Eighty-two children were among the dead. During the course of the day 14 survivors, including four children, returned to Jonestown. Two of the children had minor flesh wounds and were evacuated to Georgetown. The survivors gave an account of the last moments. It was mass suicide.

Almost all the bodies, after some 50 hours outdoors, are in an advanced stage of decomposition. Medical authorities from GOG who were on the scene were very concerned about health hazards. They do not have facilities or the capability, even in Georgetown, for dealing with a problem of this magnitude and are relying on our assistance.

The GOG police investigation has proceeded rapidly. They have identified about half of the bodies and have recovered some 800 to 900 passports which should assist in identification. Examination of the passports (still in hands of GOG police investigators) should also give some clues as to the number of survivors who fled to the jungle and who they may be. The Embassy had previously estimated this at about 1100. Identification of the remaining bodies will be difficult and probably beyond the capability of the Guayanese authorities.

In the conversation between Dikeos and Deputy Assistant Secretary Bushnell, it was agreed that available air transport would be critical tomorrow. In using air transport capacity, first priority would be given to the search for those who may still be alive in the surrounding very heavy jungle. Mr. Dikeos pointed out that the survivors are quite terrified and may be reluctant to leave their hiding places to return to Jonestown. At the same time, the question of identification and transportation of the bodies will become critical by Wednesday.

At this point the GOG authorities are not issuing death certificates, but the Embassy will urge them to do so. Mr. Dikeos observed that both GOG authorities and the Embassy had heard of a graveyard in Jonestown where the dead might be buried, but no one had seen it. He suggested that perhaps the survivors could locate the graveyard if the decision were made to bury the remains in Guyana.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

In view of the time elapsed since the death of Americans at Jonestown, difficulties of identifying the remains, the tropical climate and problems in transporting the large number of bodies from the remote site, the Department is instructing the Embassy to seek GOG assistance in local burial in marked graves after identification.

DOD continues with its preparations to dispatch support units, helicopters and a Graves Identification team to Georgetown. At this time, two C-141's with the Graves Identification team are scheduled to depart Fort Bragg at approximately 0800 (EST). Two C-130's carrying supplies and support personnel will depart Howard AFB at 0300 and 0600 (EST) and arrive in Georgetown at 0800 and 1100. The C-141's with the helicopters will depart later. Transportation will also be provided to a team of six FBI Agents (one from Washington, D.C., and five from Miami), Jim Ward from SCA and Fred Shaver from ICA.

The aircraft carrying the bodies of Congressman Ryan and three newsmen is scheduled to arrive at Charlestown, S.C. at 0040 on November 21 and to arrive in San Francisco at 0830 (California time).

At the request of President Carter, Vice President Mondale has expressed condolences to the families of Congressman Ryan and the newsmen killed at Jonestown.

Stephen R. Gibson, ARA/ECP
Guyana Working Group

T. Reynders
Senior Watch Officer